

VZCZCXRO0234  
OO RUEHDBU RUEHPW  
DE RUEHBUL #1298 1411634  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 211634Z MAY 09  
FM AMEMBASSY KABUL  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9021  
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L KABUL 001298

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR THE SECRETARY, SECDEF GATES, NSA JONES, SRAP  
HOLBROOKE AND CJCS MUULEN FROM AMBASSADOR EIKENBERRY

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2019  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [EAID](#) [AF](#)  
SUBJECT: KARZAI'S ELECTION CAMPAIGN PLAN

Classified By: Ambassador Karl W. Eikenberry for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)  
)

¶1. (C) I met with Jelani Popal, the Director General of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (ILDG) and the discussion confirmed my view that governance remains a linchpin of our success in Afghanistan. Popal was particularly focused on weakness in district level governance, where he said the failure of the Afghan government to follow through and hold people accountable has allowed the Taliban, which does follow through on its statements even if brutally, to hold greater sway in more conflicted districts.

¶2. (C) Popal asked me about the status of U.S. funding of the Afghan Social Outreach Program (ASOP). I told Popal that we are expeditiously assessing the program, but then asked him how he sees this program fitting into the Karzai Administration's broader governance strategy. I noted to Popal that his ideas are innovative and clear, but questioned whether the Karzai Administration had articulated a political agenda for the election that fully embraces these ideas and pressed him on what the Karzai Administration stands for. Not unexpectedly, Popal had no clear answers. He said the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is a good road map and strategy, but admitted that there had not yet been a clear message from President Karzai. Unprompted, he said the only candidate with a clearly articulated vision is Ashraf Ghani.

¶3. (C) I emphasized to Popal the importance of President Karzai embracing publicly an integrated government strategy on the future of Afghanistan, including programs like the ASOP. I noted that a government looking for a new term needs to be projecting a positive agenda and vision for the future of Afghanistan. I also emphasized our caution in making funding decisions uniquely tied to this Administration uninformed by coherent long-term strategy and ascribed commitments.

¶4. (C) My meeting with Popal followed a discussion earlier in the day with National Security Advisor Zalmay Rassoud in which I pressed him on the status of Karzai's campaign plan. He said there is nothing announced yet, but they are working on a draft plan that would be rolled at when the official campaign season begins in June. I found it striking, though not surprising, that Popal showed no evidence of being part of the development of Karzai's political agenda despite his being the lead official on governance and one of Karzai's top election advisors.  
EIKENBERRY